



“Human Trafficking and Transnational Organized Crime: Assessing Trends and Combat Strategies”

**Chris Smith, Chairman
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
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Good morning and welcome to our witnesses and everyone joining us today.

This morning we'll be talking about human trafficking and transnational organized crime – what are the links and how do we fight them?

In 1998 I introduced the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, and not long after that chaired this commission's first hearing on human trafficking. At that time, the idea that human trafficking existed and was widespread was met with a wall of skepticism and opposition. People, whether in government or not, thought the bold new strategy of the Trafficking Victim's Protection Act - sheltering, asylum and other protections for the victims, long jail sentences and asset confiscation for the traffickers, and tough sanctions for governments that failed to meet minimum standards - were merely a solution in search of a problem. Today few would deny that the scourge of human trafficking, though hidden, is in fact widespread.

Back in the 1990s, the term trafficking was applied almost exclusively to illicit drugs or weapons. Reports of vulnerable persons – especially women and children – being reduced to objects for sale were met with surprise, incredulity or indifference. It took two years to educate people and muster the votes for passage.

Today, as we explore the links between transnational organized crime and trafficking, I'd like to start by pointing out that this is a new frontier in the fight against human trafficking. Years ago, human traffickers were not highly organized and were not typically connected to gangs that were involved in other kinds of organized crime. This is less and less true today – and we need to consider how methods of fighting human trafficking need to adapt.

We know that human trafficking - modern day slavery - is the third most lucrative criminal activity in the world. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) human traffickers make profits in excess of \$31 billion a year. So it is not surprising that more and more organized criminal groups are engaging in human trafficking. And of courses while drug and arms traffickers have a commodity that can only be sold once, a human trafficker can purchase a slave and continually exploit them until he's made his money back. After that it's all profit.

This is a complex subject. It is marked by the growing ingenuity of organized criminal groups, the difficulty of knowing what – or who – passes over increasingly porous borders, and the gangs' use of modern technologies. All this has obscured the activities of many syndicates and made learning about and fighting their activities difficult. Yet is it not impossible, and it simply has to be done - so many innocent and vulnerable lives are at stake.

I'd like to conclude with one very important point, the premise that must shape how we approach the fight against transnational organized crime as it diversifies its operations into human trafficking: human beings are more important than drugs and guns, on every level. Our allocation of effort and resources, whether investigative or prosecutorial, has to reflect this.

Today we are joined by a panel of experts on transnational organized crime and human trafficking, who will shed light on current patterns and countermeasures. Their combined expertise should paint a clearer picture of organized crime's involvement in human trafficking and what we can do to help stop it.

With us today is Mr. Greg Andres, the current Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Crime Division where he supervises the Organized Crime Section at the Department of Justice. Mr. Andres comes to us with over a decade of experience working on organized crime issues.

We are also joined by Mr. Piero Bonadeo, Deputy Representative for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in New York. Mr. Bonadeo's testimony will bring the UNODC's years of expertise in combating Transnational Organized Crime.

Finally, we have Ms. Martina Vandenberg, a seasoned attorney with years of experience combating trafficking in persons, as well as in broader human rights context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Russian Federation, and Uzbekistan—all of which have significant human trafficking histories and are of great interest to our Helsinki Commission.

We look forward to your testimonies.